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ABSTRACT

This document presents the text of a roundtable discussion on the topic of best practice in workplace literacy in which six individuals representing the following agencies/organizations participated: Ontario (Canada) Ministry of Education; City of York Board of Education; an employer in Markham, Ontario; a community literacy group in Ontario's Kitchener/Waterloo area; a private consulting firm in the field of workplace literacy; a Canadian government agency working on a labor assignment program; and the Metropolitan Toronto District Labour Council. The following were among the topics discussed during the roundtable: the definition and scope of workplace literacy; components and factors contributing to the effectiveness/success of workplace literacy programs; obstacles/barriers faced by businesses and unions attempting to develop and delivery workplace literacy programs; the elements and role of organizational needs assessments; workplace literacy program outcomes/results expected by employers and employees; the process and purpose of a literacy task analysis; strategies/procedures for developing effective partnerships among employers, unions, workers, and service providers; procedures for identifying and recruiting learners; curriculum development; program evaluation; and challenges faced by small businesses in developing/delivering workplace literacy programs. (MN)

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ISSUES IN WORKPLACE LITERACY
WORKPLACE LITERACY

Roundtable

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Literacy Branch
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June, 1991

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ISSUES IN WORKPLACE LITERACY

Ed Godden

Welcome to a round-table discussion on the topic of, "Best Practice in Workplace Literacy". My name's Ed Godden and I'm the Manager of Workplace Literacy with the Ontario Ministry of Education. We've assembled a panel of six people with some background and experience in delivering workplace literacy programs and doing research on the issue.

Judy Wright is with the City of York Board of Education. Seated next to her is Cheryl Crumb from AMP Canada, an employer located in Markham, Ontario. Next, is Sande Minke. Sande is Executive Director of English in the Working Environment, a community literacy group based in the Kitchener/Waterloo area. To my right is Sue Waugh. Sue is a private consultant who's doing a lot of work with various groups on the topic of workplace literacy across the province. Glenda Lewe is with the government of Canada and is working on a labour assignment program of Labour Canada, currently. Next to Glenda is Linda Young of the Metro Labour Education Centre. That's a project of the Metropolitan Toronto District Labour Council.

The first question is a very general one. I'll ask the panellists each to give their definition of what workplace literacy is and what it consists of?

Glenda Lewe

I think it's important to realize that it's more than just the basic reading and writing and numeracy that we all think of when we think of literacy. It also includes things like critical thinking, problem solving, team work.

Sue Waugh

I think that workplace literacy is more than just offering stand-alone programs at the workplace having to deal with workplace specific issues. I think that it's also dealing with workplace issues in other ways, through organizational development, looking at ways that companies can adjust their policies and practices to deal with some of the issues that come up.

Sande Minke

The workplace as an organism or organization that has to become literate in many ways in terms of structure and processes, procedures, whatever. You can't decontexturalize the learner from the entire workplace.

Cheryl Crumb

When we implemented a workplace learning literacy program in our company, one of the first obstacles we had to overcome was the name itself, "workplace literacy". Perhaps in the academic world, that's a name that is acceptable but in the practical world of employees who are being turned, in their mind's, illiterate, we had to spend a lot of time educating people and educating supervisors and managers on what upgrades we were looking at, that it went far beyond what we normally thought of as literate or illiterate.

Linda Young

Workplace literacy involves the company, the worker, and the union and to incorporate all the needs from all those parties with the workers needs being our priority.

We are finding that there are workers coming into our program who might have grade 9 or grade 10, but because they've been out of school for maybe twenty years, or so, and they haven't had to use their reading and writing and math skills, they've deteriorated. We have to get them up to a certain level once again for them to be successful in anything that they want to participate in. Whether it's society, their union, company training programs, promotions, anything. So, that's what we're coming across. It's all quite fundamental.

Ed Godden

Given that broad based definition of workplace literacy that we all seem to agree with, what are the components of a successful and effective workplace literacy program?

Judy Wright

These are things that aren't programs, per say, but I think they're an important part of a successful program where you look at the whole of the organization and examine not just the way the employees are receiving information, or their ability to receive information, but also the way that material, written or spoken, is being

presented to them. We're talking about communication, written and oral, and I think that's an important part of a successful program. Look at the whole of the issue.

Glenda Lewe

I think an effective program is also based on a partnership with each partner realizing their own goals. I think that if you have a program which is not based on equal partnerships between the business, the union, the educator, service provider and the worker himself, then it's bound to fail. You just don't have the components that will make it all work successfully. Everyone has to feel that they've something to gain from the partnership and something to contribute. Then, it works much more.

Linda Young

But also, pay time for workers to attend classes on company time is a very important factor, as well, for all of the obvious reasons. The responsibilities outside of the workplace, day care, shift work and all those kinds of things, if it can be on paid time, that's where we've seen the most effective program worker. Also, it shows to the employee that the company is really committed, as well. I think the same for the employer...the way the workers are on their own time, as well.

And, what goes on in the classroom has to be confidential. Nothing will go back to the employer or to the union as to how you are functioning within that classroom.

While we try to address everybody's needs, I think the workers needs have to come first. If that worker comes into class and they're looking for a promotion or their child is...they want to help their child with their grade 10 math, they want to see results when they leave that classroom that day. They want to be able to implement what they're learning. So, whether it's outside the workplace or within the workplace, then I think we have to be sensitive to the workers needs immediately while incorporating the employers needs, as well.

Sue Waugh

I think that it has to be presented in a very dignified and respectful way for all the people in the workplace. Using the word literacy and some of the terms that are floating around now in some of the studies that we're seeing I think can kill it before it even begins.

If the program or initiatives are presented as something the people can come to if they want to meet their own needs is also important. But, I think the language and how we address the issue is really crucial at the beginning when the partnership is set up.

Cheryl Crumb

I think that the effectiveness of a program begins before D-Day. It begins with the advertising and promotion. We found that researched for volunteers. We involved our managers and our supervisors in meetings and then became involved with discussions with various people. But, it was a very slow process. These people decided to risk embarrassment to...well, to risk everything about themselves to participate in the program.

I also agree with Linda in that offering it on company time is, I think, mandatory. Everything else that a company does, all other training, is offered on company time. We want to show that we value literacy training to the same degree that we value problem solving and decision making and computer training. We would never think about offering those off-time.

Sande Minke

The issue that the time goes in at the beginning. I think that sometimes there's the tendency to do that and assume that everything's set-up and off we go and lose track of that flexibility that we all try to build into our programs knowing that things will change over time; knowing that there's going to be interaction happening within the classroom between the trainer and the other stake holders on the floor. Unless that kind of communication is maintained throughout the program, I think, again, you can fall down into a less priority, or a less essential, part of the overall training program of a company or be not seen as something that requires investment throughout, as opposed to, simply the initial set-up and then come back in at the end.

Linda Young

The other thing that I'd like to point out, as well, from our perspective, is that it's important to have really good adult educators delivering the program. They need training...on-going training and also on-going support and kept in contact with them. Make sure you choose the right person to deliver that program.

Glenda Lewe

A successful program quite often breeds another successful program. Once a program has been completed and if it's been done well, those workers are enthusiastic and their enthusiasm spreads over to other workers who may want to go on a similar program.

Ed Godden

What are the main obstacles, or barriers, that people face when they're trying to develop and deliver a workplace literacy program? How do you overcome those obstacles and barriers?

Glenda Lewe

Quite often, the business and union are aware that they want to have a workplace program but they don't know where the service providers are. They don't know who to go to. They don't know who is good. They don't know who is a snake oil salesman and who isn't, more or less. Who is the good service provider and who is the one that is less good? That's a question that is very difficult for a business person or a union person to know the answer to. It's hard to know even where to get the answer to that question.

I think what needs to be done is somehow these possible providers need to be networked together. It's not always easy because there's no natural place where these people meet. Sometimes, they might meet naturally through a chamber of commerce kind of thing or, maybe in a smaller community more so than in a large one. But, one of the very largest barriers, I feel, is just simply getting the people who could be working collaboratively together. I think there's an awful lot of attention that has to be given as to just how do you do that.

Cheryl Crumb

I think if you were to ask any manager in our company what the largest obstacle would be...I mean, it would be a very practical one and that's time away from the job. Nobody would deny the importance of workplace literacy. Philosophically, they would agree that it was the right thing to do. Especially last year during the year of literacy, it was a popular thing to do. But, at a time when a company is de-layering and the economic restraints are as they are, then they are faced with, how do I get the work done with less people over a long period of time? I think that, that is the number one main obstacle that we in companies have to face.

Linda Young

What I see as one of the biggest barriers for small companies...it's very difficult because they have a limited staff to do the work. So, when you go in there and you start negotiating, fifty per-cent of the time is on company time for the classroom and they've only got a staff of maybe twenty people on a shift on the assembly line, and you need a minimum of six people in the class, it becomes a real problem.

The other thing that I'm finding which makes things very difficult is twelve hour shifts. We have a lot of companies now who are operating seven days a week, twelve hour shifts. So, that means workers have their days off during the week. It's very rare a company will give 100% time to class. They just can't afford it. So, how do you do classes with twelve hour shift workers starting at seven in the morning and they finish at seven at night? That's another barrier, is the shift work in that, as well. Sometimes, you just can't run the program. Sometimes, there is no solution.

Glenda Lewe

I think that in the case when you have the non-unionized workplace, I think that there's an added burden, or an added responsibility that falls on the other partners. Especially, perhaps, the education partner to take care of looking at all those factors that the union normally would be looking at. So, it's just a whole new layer of responsibility on the other partners.

Sandy Minke

About non-unionized workplace's and the other partners having to carry a greater load. We do a fair number of programming in non-unionized workplace's. We find that is the time when you bring a worker "rep" onto the committee and that's when you start involving them from that point. It may not be an organized kind of representation but these people are perfectly able to represent that perspective. It gives them, again, a sense of responsibility and involvement and a way to begin to express...communicate with the rest of the organization what the needs are and how things are going. Very often, they're the one's helping to solve those scheduling problems, or whatever comes along.

Sue Waugh

I think often people come in to the advisory meetings, or at the beginning of the partnership, with a lot of preconceived ideas about, you know, who needs it, what it is, is it related to intelligence, is it related to grade level, is it only certain people, and this kind of thing. I think that it's very, very important to debunk those myths, right away.

Ed Godden

We've mentioned organizational needs assessments as a component of good practice in developing programs. What is an organizational needs assessment? What is it's role in developing a workplace literacy program?

Sue Waugh

Basically, I think it's looking at basic skills issues within the context of all the other organizational issues and the impact that those issues will have on anything that you establish. It's really a way to get the commitment of the entire workplace because it involves talking with all levels of the workplace and getting their in-put into what they think the issues are.

I think the other advantage of the organizational needs assessment is that it is a way of tapping into people's perceptions without singling people out as needing a program or needing to upgrade their skills. I think it's really a first step to getting the in-put of the entire workplace to see where you can go after that. What are the areas...where do people feel that they want to upgrade? Are there other issues that are going to have an impact on anything that you might suggest as a service provider?

I think it's really important to see the organizational needs assessment as a first step in a process. It's very important to see it as not a worker assessment, in a sense. It's not focusing on the individual needs of a worker for a program. That comes later once you've looked at all the parameters through the organizational needs assessment.

Judy Wright

It also gives you an opportunity to differentiate between what a service provider can do educationally and what the organization has to look at before a program can be successful. I find that, that part is probably the most difficult but the most necessary. It gives you a reading on whether a program will be successful. Often, it's by the issues and the problems in attitude that have arisen.

You, again, have a focus for your advisory group and employers to work on solving those problems before a program can take place. There's nothing worse, I think, than focusing just on the educational needs of that assessment and getting in there and running into the barriers. It helps you eliminate the barriers before you get started.

Glenda Lewe

By doing a thorough organizational needs assessment in the first place, it means that the company and the union and the service provider can really key attention to the right parts of the organization in terms of getting started. Without that, there might be a tendency just to jump in and say, "Well, let's jump in and start working on the skills that need upgrading in Division A". But, if you've done an organizational needs assessment, maybe you'd see that Division C had much more need for an upgrading process. Maybe because of a large number of ethnic workers or maybe because of changes in the technology where things were really going to be evolving in a very different way in that division in the next little while.

Sande Minke

I think you need to focus on the real need and the real need may have been appropriately assessed but, perhaps, the support systems that would make that training truly successful and truly change the efficiency or the communication flow, or whatever, around the workplace hasn't been addressed; hasn't been noticed.
So, what the organizational needs assessment would allow you to do then is to say, "Yes, we proceed with this training but these policies, these procedures have to be changed, as well, for this to be effective". They're inter-related.

Sue Waugh

Well, I think that an organizational needs assessment would start with the project team or an advisory committee very shortly after the partnership has been established among labour, management and the educational partner. I think the project team is really key in determining what's going to be asked in the organizational needs assessment. What are those other questions that you need to ask around the educational needs?
I think the advisory team, or a project team, would then assist in, okay, how are we going to get people involved in this organizational needs assessment? It really should be voluntary. It shouldn't be something that anybody is forced to participate in, but people could be asked. It would involve a sampling of employees at the workplace. Often, ten to twenty per-cent have been very successful. Of course it would depend on the size of the workplace. In a small workplace, you could interview everybody. In a large workplace with twenty thousand people, you would have to focus, maybe, on a specific department.
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Ed Godden

What outcomes, or results, do employers expect from workplace literacy programs?

Cheryl Crumb

I know...in our company we have five core strategic objectives. One of them has to do with the involvement of the employees so that they are able to delight our customers. The measure that we are...that's the term we're using, "to delight our customers". We're talking now about "wowing" our customers! One of our measures is the number of people who participate in what we call our "Good Idea's Program". It's very different from your typical North American suggestion program. It's employees being involved in implemented good ideas. They implement an idea and then they are rewarded. This year we had approximately thirty-some per-cent of the employees involved. What we are trying to get involved in next year is a fifty per-cent level and employees submitting at least twelve implemented good idea's. We think that the literacy program will help in this respect. As a matter of fact, some good ideas have come out of some of the literacy classes where they used as their workplace assignments the development of some good ideas in class.

So, I'd say that one of the key outcomes is an increase in participation.

Linda Young

Where we've done an evaluation with the company, the union and the workers and instructors and with the first line supervisors. It's been the key issue that's come up. Wow, you know, the workers are really participating and I noticed this difference in confidence as well as practical skills at being able to fill out the forms and write reports. So, there's more participation in the company and that seems to be very important to the company and they're quite excited about it.

Sue Waugh

I think a part of more participation is better communications. Certainly, some of the companies that I've worked with see that as a very important outcome.

Judy Wright

And being able to adapt to change. There are several companies (???) want their smaller company and they don't want to let employees go when a new area opens up. So, they want...they find that people are able to adapt. It doesn't mean we've taught them those skills. I think it's the attitudinal benefits that come from taking a literacy program or just being involved in that problem solving aspect. They feel more confident. It isn't that we've taught them to think. They're more confident in their own abilities to solve problems and be more self directed. They're able to communicate better. They know how to raise issues now. That's what I'm hearing from employers.

Cheryl Frum

I know. We embarked on a quality improvement process about six years ago. One of the main tenants is that you need to recognize who your customers are. Not only your external customers but your internal customers. Then, once you identify who your customers are, what are the products and services you provide? And, to identify your customers requirements. Well, for many of our people, particularly those who came from other nations, this was something that was not done. They did the work that always had been done, rather than ask and anticipate and then continuously improve. So, the communication with internal customers is a crucial requirement that we now have of the literacy outcomes.

Glenda Lewe

I think it's important, too, that the employers have realistic expectations about what will happen after a program has taken place. Sometimes there's this tendency of a company to think that there's going to be a day and night improvement. That all of a sudden these employees are going to be just so much more productive. Sometimes they want to measure right away and they'll say, "Well, let's have an instant post measurement and see just how much more effective these people are". Then, they tend to be disappointed if they can't calculate, sort of, all these instant improvements.

It's much more realistic if they take a longer range look and just see in a year's time how many people have applied for other jobs, how many people have the confidence to look for a transfer, how many people have joined workplace committee's, how many people have taken an interest in serving in other capacities in the company? These are the ways in which it can be measured.

I tend to avoid, very firmly, making promises that a literacy program will improve the performance levels of employees. I think that's a myth. There are so many other factors. If anything improves performance, it's that rise in confidence and participation and commitment to the job which are by-products of both the, perhaps, the skills training, but it has an awful lot to do with the support from the employer, as well, in the feelings of confidence that generate. .

Cheryl Crumb

But, at the same time, with everything else that we're trying...you know, with what employers are doing, and companies, and training our managers, and developing self-management training concepts and philosophies, we are expecting that there's going to be an improvement in productivity. Either by improvements that have been made in the process, or work that is being done faster, or less errors that are occurring because of communication gaps. I suppose I have a bit of a concern in that

I know we have to be realistic and I know it has to be over a long term. But, at the same point, I, as an employer, and the supervisors and managers, if we've invested this amount of money, we not only want to have their personal development, which is important, we also want to see progress on the job.

Sande Minke

That's also why the training program, or the literacy program, needs to be always within the context of what else is going on.

Cheryl Crumb

Exactly. It has to be part of the system.

Sandy Minke

Exactly, and that the responsibility for improvement falls on far more than that individual.

Cheryl Crumb

That's correct.

Sandy Minke

It's part of the process.

Ed Godden

What kind of results, or outcomes, do the employees themselves expect from a workplace literacy program?

Judy Wright

I don't think the confidence improvement we've been talking about is something that the employees go into the program expecting. I haven't run into very many employee groups who go in and say, "I'm taking this program so that I feel more confident". I think it comes out...I guess the way they phrase it more is, "I'm really not sure" or "I'd like to be able to do this better". That is performance and I think we work on that. Those with a practical...they expect some practical results. They expect to be able to apply their knowledge and their skills a lot better.

Linda Young

I think initially the workers in the class want to see concrete results. It might be filling that form out, or be able to take a phone message so they're not dependent on the co-worker's or supervisor's.

Sande Minke

I think that sometimes it's a very specific objective that they have coming in. But, it's the door of opportunity, I suppose, that many realize is achievable; that they're going to be able to look at other things.

Sue Waugh

I think it's not always work related. I think there are a whole range of goals, objectives that people come in with. I think it's really important to accommodate the whole range of learning objectives that employees might have.

Judy Wright

I have run into employers who say, "I don't want any personal issues. This is job related and I'm paying for it". I think that kind of attitude is diminishing now. People see, that in order to be truly worth while and to be applicable, you have to be able to apply it to many aspects of your life even though it might originate in a situation within the workplace. So, that combination of work job specific issues and relating it to your life, in general, is a given. It comes in whether you build it into the curriculum, or not. You've got to be able to apply the skills in many different ways.

Sue Waugh

I think the really important point is that the workers are involved in developing and designing the program. I think in that way, when people are consulted and they have in-put into the program, it's going to meet those work-related and other needs. It's going to be successful because it's meeting the needs that people have expressed.

Sande Minke

I think, by the same token, the transferability can work in other ways if one of the leading objectives of the people in the program is to be able to speak to their teenage children, or whatever. It's usually a bit more specific than that, or it could be. But,

there's nothing wrong with addressing that primarily and transferring the other way. You know, moving from the problem solving, the communication skills in the personal sphere into the work sphere.

Ed Godden

One of the processes that's undertaken in developing a workplace literacy program is a literacy task analysis. What is a literacy task analysis? How is it performed and how does it relate to the issue of good practice in workplace literacy?

Glenda Lewe

A literacy task analysis is a process of finding the literacy components that exist in jobs. It's isolating those components, in a sense, so that they can be looked at in the design of training programs.

There are generally three major reasons for doing a literacy task analysis. One of them would be for learning a job, or for knowing how to do a job better. An entry level worker needs to learn a job and it's valuable if the basic skills within that job can be looked at separately as to just what they are so that training can make sure that, for that entry level worker, those literacy skills are, indeed, skills that the incumbent has, or will have, through training.

So, it can be used for knowing the job better, or learning a job. Also, for transferability because it may be that a worker is in a job and wants to transfer to some other job in the company. Literacy task analysis can be used to identify the skill gaps; the gap between one job and another. So, the skill levels can be looked at in terms of the two jobs.

There are a great many different techniques that can be used to do that. Usually, you do an observation.You select a highly competent worker and you look at how that person does the job. So, you are looking for the skills that will be required when it's being done by the highly competent worker. Then, you design training programs that will try to build skills up to that level so it's not used as a way if identifying deficiencies of any workers. Because it's been used that way, in some cases, it has been criticized. But, I think if it's done sensitively, it can avoid some of those problems.

Ed Godden

Strong partnerships appear to be a real key in mounting an effective workplace literacy program. How are effective partnerships developed among employers, unions, and workers, and service providers?

Judy Wright

Slowly, over time. I think the methods you use, initially, to contact the organization and the employer, or the union, whichever entry point you're using, you have to present a solid presentation package. You have to have your marketing down. But, I think true partnerships are developed through the use of that team approach up-front.

Sue Waugh

I think a true partnership is where each partner recognizes the expertise of the other. I come back to thinking of the service provider often going in, thinking maybe that they have all the expertise and that's simply not true. The union's and management have pieces that we need. If those pieces aren't there, then the whole thing collapses. I think the recognition of that is key to establishing a successful partnership.

Glenda Lewe

Another thing is, are the partners to be equal partners, or are some partners to be resources? I tend to think of all the partners as being equal partners. But, I discovered that, in some cases, unions and businesses do not regard it that way. They regard the service provider as a resource who is coming to them and only as a resource, but not as an equal partner. Now, if that service provider comes in thinking that he, or she, is an equal partner and then it turns out that the others are thinking of him as a resource, then there will be misunderstandings.

Linda Young

I'm not so sure that I agree that all three partners will be equal. I don't see the service provider ever having that equal partnership.Ultimately, business is the one that has the power to decide whether the program goes; under what circumstances; when it will start; when it will finish; if it will continue. I think you have to be sensitive to that.

Where there's a union in place, then I think there, even though it's not always equal there, but it will be the union with the company that will do a lot of the negotiating as to if this program does continue, how it will work, etc., etc.

What the service provider does is exactly that. You're providing a service to the union and the company and the workers at that company. But, I don't think that you could ever see yourself as equal partnership.I think you have more of a partnership and more of a say if they respect what you're bringing and you've brought a credibility. I think that you have to earn that. I think it might take a while.

Judy Wright

But, the instructor, especially, is the front line person. They have to understand fully that they are a resource person, they are a service. If the company comes in half-way through or the employer says, "You know, this has come up", or if the employees bring an issue up, or the union does, then that has to be looked at and adjustments can be made. The same thing is you can't get terribly upset when a company says, "We can't let them off for four hours this week. There's a production crises and we've got to produce". The instructor has to realize these are realities of workplace programs. So, there's a lot of training issues there.

Sande Minke

I think there are some cases where the instructor does have to have a certain amount of authority; a certain amount of control, power, however you want to say it, in terms of protecting the rights of the people in the class and knowing that those people are relying on them to be there spokesperson, I suppose, in terms of what's going on in the class.

So, I think relegating the service providers, or the actual trainers, to a less than equal position, you have to be careful. At a certain point, they are the representatives of the people in that class on certain issues. To think of them simply as a service provider, like someone else that might come in that could be interrupted in their work, or have some greater overriding authority is a bit dangerous, I think.

Ed Godden

To move on to the topic of identifying and recruiting learners for workplace literacy programs. How should that be done?

Linda Young

I have a very definite opinion based on experience face to face. There's no other way. We encourage the company and the union to allow us to address the workers in any workplace face to face on company paid time regardless if it's a small company or a large organization.

When we started out, we used to put notices up on the union's board, on company bulletin-boards. For second language speakers, it wasn't so bad. There's no stigma attached to a second language speaker signing up for an English class. But, I am coordinator of a literacy program for English speakers. Well, if you put a sign up where people can't read and write, they're not going to sign up in the first place. But, more importantly was that the stigma attached to an English speaker worker who's been to school in Canada signing up for an English and Math upgrading class

and, well, "Are you stupid? Didn't you go to school?" The supervisors, you know, do they want their company to know that they are signing up for an English and Math upgrading class? I think in their minds it was more, "Well, I went to school and I'm supposed to be able to write this report, or fill in these forms, or be able to write notes to the school". They know, internally, or they know that they have problems with their writing skills, or their math skills, but they don't want to broadcast it to their co-workers in the company. So, now people do sign up for English and Math classes on the bulletin board for all those kinds of reasons.

Sue Waugh

In the information session and talking to people face to face, I think it's really important to let them know that this is not going to be like traditional school where maybe you experienced failure. There are not going to be any textbooks, we're not going to have the desks all lined up, there are not going to be tests. These are all the things that people have expressed to me in an organizational needs assessment. If anything were offered here, I hope there wouldn't be textbooks, or tests. They have a lot of concerns. They want to be comfortable. They want it to be informal. They want it to be offered at a time that is convenient for them, that they can come to.

Glenda Lewe

In terms of recruiting people into the programs, there has to be a certain amount of specificity that they know that it's going to be relevant to them. This doesn't mean that it's all cut and dry before they get in because learner participation in setting up the program is very important. But, at the same time, when they are first approached, they need to know that there's going to be some relevance for them both as a worker and as an individual. And that, a number of their peers will also be involved in it. Sometimes, once a few people have been recruited they become the best recruiters for getting other people into the program because people tend to listen more to their own peers and co-workers and then it mushrooms a little bit from there.

Cheryl Crumb

I agree wholeheartedly with everything that is being said, so far. We try to be very sensitive to our employee's feelings. We started out with a poster program recognizing that probably some of the people couldn't even read the poster. But, we tried to keep it very simple just to begin to get people's attention. We sent out memos then to supervisors, calling supervisory meetings. We held one-on-one sessions with them afterwards in terms of what we were trying to do, why we were trying to do it and we needed their help because we recognized that a written approach was not going to be successful. But, at least it was a beginning to get some people interested.

Then we had a large meeting, with those people who were intrigued but who weren't quite willing to commit, in which we offered what the program was about. We tried to protect their fears. Yet, somewhere we still haven't, I guess, been as successful as I would like because all of the twenty-some participants in our program are non-Canadian educated people. So, we have not yet appealed successfully to the born and bred and educated in Canada people who are having trouble with particular skills. That's why I'm very interested in how do we get past the, you know, it's okay to come from China, or India, or South America, or France, or Quebec? Those are okay. But, how do I make that next big step?

Linda Young

Is it management that's making the presentation?

Cheryl Crumb

No, we've been involving our equal partner from...let's say, we've been doing it jointly.

Linda Young

I mean, not that you're not sincere and no one is doubting that but there is still...that even/equal partner is not known. It's a strange...I think where we're successful is we have the union there as well, okay? It does help in the sense that there's management, the union, and this outsider. But, also as an outsider, we are part of the union movement, as well.

I think that has a lot to do with it because you're still going to run out with, "I'm the English speaker". Okay, you're telling me it's safe but how do I really know? You know, it's difficult. I don't have any answers for you but it's working right now for us in our approach to it and maybe having the union there is part of that other part.

Cheryl Frum

Did it start out that way, Linda? Or, was there a progression?

Linda Young

There was progression.

Cheryl Frum

Maybe we're just too soon.

Linda Young

Yes, yes.

Judy Wright

It's getting around that incredible fear of being found out that you don't have the skills which many people expect. I find that eventually, if we have any learners coming in like that, I'm fortunate enough to be able to give a one-on-one type of program, as well as a class. Often, again, just getting that one person to come forward can be the spokesperson because management, despite their intentions, doesn't work. I work in a lot of non-union places so there's no union to deal with the issue.

Ed Godden

Should curriculum materials be workplace specific?

Linda Young

No.

Glenda Lewe

I think there's room for all kinds of variations. I think there are times and places where you need other kinds of things that are not curriculum related. But, I think there is a very definite place for technical kind of training programs.

I think in many cases, this is the spur that gets management interested. Quite often management is not going to want to spend the time to introduce a program that is completely learner-centred. From the management point of view they want to know that there's something in it for management. So, they'll say, "Yes, certainly we want people to learn and to develop in their own individual way, but we also want that there be something in it for us as a company". In that regard, by having some curriculum related materials and curriculum related courses, a management feels that it's gaining its' goal.

Also, what happens is that the workers gain more confidence in doing their job because they are doing their job, spending most of their working life actually doing jobs. If their literacy learning is related to the kinds of things they're doing, then they get this sense of accomplishment in the workplace. This leads to greater workplace growth both as an individual and as a worker. **[Break]**

Judy Wright

I feel we should have a balance between workplace and the option to have other life experiences.You can either start with a job specific situation, where you apply skills and move to applying it in the rest of the learner's life. Or, if the learner wants, you can start with the home life, or personal life and move to a job specific.

So, I think because of that, you need both. You need to...you draw the outside experiences...it's an experiential approach, I guess, to summarize it, more than a job specific approach. It can be a work experience or a personal experience. That's where the bulk of curriculum comes from.

Sue Waugh

I think at all times, although we're concerned with meeting the needs of our learners, we have to be concerned about the other players, too, and to have a good balance. So, every player, management, labourer and the worker feel that needs are being met. We really need to, I think, include a whole array including job specific and including materials that meet the personal needs of learners outside the workplace. I think, also, that each workplace and the people in it will determine what that balance is. That will come from the workplace itself.

Sande Minke

I think it would be unrepresentative to portray the worker as being the one that would like to have non-job specific kind of curriculum, you know, to help me with some things in my personal life as opposed to learning stuff on the job. In our experience, we've had the strongest pleas for workplace specificity from the people in the class saying, as most adult learner's will say, "I need direct application. I need to see the relevance of this so that when I walk out this classroom door, I can begin to implement what I've been learning".

Cheryl Crumb

There are people who are taking English as second language courses through local community colleges in the evenings. They don't compare with what the same community college is able to provide in a workplace setting. We're using company

job descriptions, company memo's, company video tapes, company job instruction forms, our "Good Idea's" forms, you know, all of the forms that the company is using.

So, I'd say it plays a tremendous role in employees feeling that the training is relevant. Certainly, from the company's aspect and, again, the company, you know, is wanting to see that there's some kind of improvement in a job performance, that's why we're seeing that improvement even over a short term. I think it's critical.

Linda Young

I think the important thing to keep in mind whatever the curriculum is and whoever is deciding that day what the curriculum might be, is that whether we're addressing the company's issues that day, or the worker's issues, or the union's, it's that we be flexible.

Ed Godden

How should evaluation be carried out? Who should do it?

Linda Young

I think the service provider should carry out the evaluation. Everybody, once again, is part of the evaluation process.

Judy Wright

You have to go into the whole program, I think, with an evaluation plan. I have a chart form which involves all the stake holders. I sometimes even use it in the presentation package because I find some employers are particularly keen to know just what is setting up the process.

I think the plan has to be flexible because some employers want feedback more often than others and that's fine.
I think you also have to make it very clear the types of evaluation tools that you're going to use. We, also, emphasize up-front that because we're a school board and some of our programs are involved in the upgrading credit granting that, that is confidential to the learner. There is some evaluation which is only for the learner just as in any educational situation in a school board, that information can only be released with written consent from the learner themselves.

Ed Godden

Where does testing of learners and of programs fit into the evaluation scheme? Or, does it fit in?

Sue Waugh

Well, I personally feel that testing really doesn't fit in. Tests have been used, I think, to the disadvantage of the worker and has put them in jeopardy in a lot of workplace situations. I feel, personally, that there are a lot of other tools that we can use besides tests to evaluate programs from the perspective of all the stake holders and get the same results.

I think one problem with a lot of the tests that are used is that they are not workplace specific and I don't think we really know what they're measuring. They give a false sense of a person's skills, or abilities. These tests, I think, can be used against people and have been used against people in situations. I really feel that there are so many alternative tools that we could use to get the same results. I would really want to stay away from them.

Glenda Lewe

I think one of the problems with tests is that quite often they're grade related. In the workplace, the grade doesn't really matter. It doesn't matter if someone comes up to a grade 10, or a grade 11, or a grade 9. It's just not relevant in terms of what's happening in the workplace. It's not a relevant concept. I think quite often people use off-the-shelf tests because it's available and it's accessible. So, they think it's easy. They say, "Okay, I'll just go and get this test and administer it," without realizing all the down sides of that.

I think it's really a case where the service provider can provide a real service, in this case, by indicating that these kinds of tests are not necessarily going to serve the needs that you think that they're going to serve and to indicate some informal means of assessing worker progress.

Sandy Minke

I think by the same token the service provider has a responsibility in making those kinds of alternatives known to the learners, as well. I think many times we run into the same situation where employers use tests because they're available, as you say. But, there's also a certain norm that that's how one evaluates, through some kind of test.

Often the learners have this same sort of mind set. As negative as their experiences may have been in school, they still have that sense of that's how you find out whether you know, okay? That's how you find out how much you've learned. So, I think we have a responsibility in offering alternatives to the learners themselves. Other ways that you can evaluate yourself besides the mark you got on a test.

If you're doing something very job specific and you throw a standardized test, usually American and often geared to adolescents, your test has no validity. It has no relationship to what you've been teaching them.

Judy Wright

I have a lot of employers who expect a test. We can be doing informal presentations in a communication course which has very little writing in it. Yet, their expectation is that we will have a written exam at the end. You have to point out to them that the relationship just isn't there. There's a lot of preconceived notions about testing. Perhaps that's why I stay away from the word completely and use "review", or "evaluation". That's really what you're doing. You're summarizing what they, at various points in the program, just what they have accomplished.

Linda Young

I agree. The testing process is...I don't think is necessary in literacy programs or upgrading programs. Initially, we explain this to the workers because they are expecting tests. Our organization is affiliated with George Brown College and, yes, they do get certificates from the college. So, that's the first question. How do I know I'm going to get my certificate? We go through this with the employer and the union right from the beginning because, you know, we do not test. But, once again, this is where the instructor plays the role. They're properly trained in the evaluation in that, why do you need a test to know that someone's improving? I mean, it's there in front of their eyes. The worker knows themselves. The instructor...aren't they working with the workers all the time on an on-going process? Aren't you building on your lesson plans all the time? I mean, you couldn't build your program if everybody was going backwards or stuck. If people do get stuck, you're very well aware of it as an instructor for those who have taught, like ourselves, in a program.

Sue Waugh

I think that their needs assessment will determine what model you choose. I think through, you know, tapping into all the (???) of the people in the workplace, it will become very clear from getting their input and the input of the key players in the partnership of what model will be appropriate for that workplace.

Glenda Lewe

I think that there are probably three main models of workplace literacy. There are probably many more than that but there are three that seem to be, perhaps, the most popular. One of those, the peer tutoring model, which the Ontario Federation of Labour has used to very good advantage and other organizations, as well. It's basically train the trainer, and then train the tutors, and then the tutors co-workers, tutoring other co-workers.

Another really popular literacy model in the workplace is what you might call the general kind of model where there's general workplace content. It's not really a peer kind of model because you do have an adult educator and there is the instructor. The content is not terribly job specific but it is job related. It might be about workplace hazards. It might be about the workplace in general, but not really channelling in on jobs.

A third popular model is a job specific integrated kind of model where you integrate literacy right into the technical content of jobs. I think all three of those models are out there and variations of them.

Linda Young

I disagree. I don't think there are different types of workplace models. I hear people going over the different types of workplace models but I hear the same thing.We're talking content, not model. The company will have their issues where we'll need these forms to address this manual. The worker says, "Well, I need to address...I want to be able to communicate with this school. I want to help my child with their homework". The union says, "Well, we have a health and safety issue". These are content. This is not a model. Workplace literacy is workplace literacy within the workplace and it involves all the players that we've been talking about today.

Sande Minke

In terms of model tutoring, small group, multi-level, those kinds of different models whether they're different, or the same model, I'm not sure any more. Sometimes it's just pure logistics. Sometimes it's the objective, or the goal has a very clear time limit on it. We've got a limited number of people that need this kind of training. You know, the one-on-one, or the small intensive group, may be the most appropriate, given the objectives. Again, I think it's very much a needs specific kind of relationship.

Ed Godden

Very briefly, what kind of unique challenges do small employers face in developing and delivering workplace literacy programs?

Sue Waugh

I think even in an urban centre, there's the issue also of small businesses. For example, retail is a perfect example where you have three, four employees and it's very busy, they're not unionized. How do you address that issue?

I think that if we can look at umbrella organizations where alliances of small businesses can be formed then, perhaps, programs can be set up under that umbrella. The needs of the small business...the needs can be met. I think this is a real key issue that I see deliverers and employers themselves are facing.

Judy Wright

Another way, which I know some people are exploring, are utilizing existing organizations such as BIA's, Business Improvement Association's, industry education councils. Ways that the smaller business person might have links to these organizations that they can provide the funding. They can access funding which the smaller organization can't.

Linda Young

But, that brings us back again to the community and people working in the corner stores, and that, and the community based programs. That's there. I mean that's where they could be, you know, filling that gap.
I think that's where the support has to go because I think, ultimately, the community based programs are the one's that are going to be able to service those kinds of situations more than, probably, us for small business. It has to go back to the community. I can't see any other way when you're talking small business because if workers can't come to a workplace program, then they're not going to do it outside their workplace within that area because when you finish work, you go back to your community.

Sue Wa

And, I think all the more reason for those of us who are service providers in the workplace to make those strong links with the community...

Linda Young

Yes, very much so.

Sue Waugh

...and through organizations in our areas so that when that kind of situation comes up, we can do the referring that, you know, that you were talking about.

Linda Young

Well, I think that we're...

Sande Minke

Or, even when it's not necessarily an either/or, that we continue to make the people in our classrooms and our small groups, or whatever, in our workplace programs aware of this community based program which can service other kinds of needs.

Glenda Lewe

Small businesses quite often link up with CITC's, the Industrial Training Councils, and I think small businesses are well placed to do that kind of linkage especially in terms of apprenticeships and some of the jobs specific things. Even though, in many ways, small businesses are disadvantaged in regard to literacy because they don't have very much money, they don't have very much financial resource. What they do have going for them is because they are small, the president can make the decision very quickly. So, when something does happen, it happens quickly whereas within a large company, sometimes, all the will is there and everyone knows what needs to be done but it takes absolute for ages to work through the bureaucracy. So, I think, even with all its' disadvantages, there is that advantage to the small company. Once it does decide to go, it can make the decision.

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